Advocate for Dancers

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You've seen Peggy Gordon even if you don't recognize her name. This gorgeous brunette appeared onscreen alongside such stars like Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, and Red Skelton in a career that spanned two decades. I was surprised to see that there was no information about her online and no indication as to whether she's deceased, but in doing a bit of research found that this lady had quite an impact on dancers and how they are recognized in Hollywood.

Peggy Jean Vaughan was born on November 14, 1927, in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her parents divorced and her mother married a vaudevillian named Roy Gordon. Roy would be the one to introduce his stepdaughter to the entertainment industry. She ultimately adopted his surname, having been estranged from her father, and used the name Peggy Gordon for the duration of her on-screen career. Peggy may not have been the most exceptional ballerina, but she was a skilled performer who took pride in her ability to learn by observing.

Her onstage debut came in Ken Murray's *Blackouts of 1944*, the long-running revue at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood. She stayed with the production until a dancer with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Willie Covan, offered to get the blue-eyed ballerina into the movies.

Initially, Peggy didn't have any ambitions of stardom, but she certainly exhibited the qualities of someone destined for success. She was content with being a "gypsy," as professional dancers commonly called themselves, doing walk-on roles in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *The Eddie Cantor Story* (1953), *The*

Peggy on break during the filming of the Red Skelton Show.

Peggy Gordon (left) and Gene Kelly in Singin' in the Rain (1952).

Peggy Gordon (left) and Keefe Brasselle (as Eddie) in The Eddie Cantor Story (1953).

Gene Kelly and Peggy Gordon (right) in An American in Paris (1951).

(l to r) Jeanne Mahoney, Jess Hill, and Peggy Gordon, All-Star Revue, 1952.

Egyptian (1954), and *The Spoilers* (1955). She once told a reporter that she thought about quitting because she was "tired of being insignificant," but television gave her greater opportunity to be onscreen. She did hundreds of episodes of *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, *All-Star Revue*, *The Donald O'Connor Show*, and *The Red Skelton Show* as both a ballerina and choreographer. It was quite an adjustment because television work was fast-paced with strict deadlines, but the pay was more than ample as she reportedly earned a mere $111.50 a week at MGM compared to $150 a week on television.

Peggy continued appearing in movies like *My Fair Lady* (1964) and *Robin and the 7 Hoods* (1964), before marrying Earle Lyon, a filmmaker and screenwriter who specialized in low-budget flicks.

She left Hollywood for a few years and worked as a realtor before founding the Professional Dancers Society, a nonprofit which helped promote the cause of dancers in the industry. The organization assisted dancers get the same rights as actors including pensions and memberships with AFTRA-SAG. If her legacy as a ballerina in the movies isn't impressive enough, the work that she did as an activist is.

As she approached her 70s, her health began to deteriorate. Knowing the end was near, she left instructions that her boxes of memorabilia, which included documents pertaining to the Professional Dancers Society, were to be donated to various libraries and historical societies. She died on March 9, 2001, in La Quinta, California, at the age of 73. I am sad to report that the memorabilia intended to be preserved was tossed out and it seems unlikely that it has been preserved.

Peggy Gordon (right) and Evelyn Keyes (middle) in The Jolson Story (1946)

Peggy Gordon and Red Skelton.

Far Left: Frank Sinatra and Peggy Gordon (right) in Robin and the 7 Hoods (1964).

Left: Doris Day and Gordon MacRae, with Peggy Gordon (upper left) in Tea for Two (1950).